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SUBJECT: UNCONVENTIONAL SECURITY FORCES -- WHAT'S OUT THERE?

REF: A. KABUL 2520

[1](#)B. KABUL 1016
[1](#)C. KABUL 1425
[1](#)D. KABUL 3366
[1](#)E. KABUL 2339
[1](#)F. KABUL 2807

Classified By: AMBASSADOR KARL EIKENBERRY FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: While the international community works to grow the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), local communities and the Afghan government (GIROA) are resorting to various unconventional security forces to protect communities from insurgents. These forces range from the U.S.-supported, GIROA-controlled Afghan Public Protection Program (AP3, refs A-C) to warlord Mir Alam Khan's Kunduz militia (ref D), which is reportedly connected to the National Directorate of Security (NDS) but seems to operate without government guidance, command or control. Private security companies, arbakai (local tribal self-defense forces), and local election security forces round out the picture, while U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) is laying groundwork for a GIROA-backed village guard program known as the Community Defense Initiative. The proliferation of these local and private bodies attests to deficiencies in the strength and quality of regular security forces and a lack of public confidence in the police. Interior Minister Hanif Atmar is trying to shape Afghan communities' responses to insecurity, heading-off the creation of independent militia forces that could challenge or undermine the ANSF. Atmar also envisions gradually replacing private Afghan security companies (PSCs), with a public guard force paid and controlled by his ministry.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) We believe that until we can build sufficient ANSF to secure the population, the U.S. should follow Atmar's pragmatic approach -- that local solutions are permissible only as a closely monitored and tightly controlled stop-gap measure tied to ANSF, that can either be demobilized or merged into the Afghan National Police and Army as those institutions grow. Otherwise, U.S. support for unconventional forces (particularly if they prove prone to manipulation by local power-brokers) could undercut popular and international support for funding formal security forces and reinforce a traditional worst practice -- the arming of ethnic or sub-tribal militias that could divide Afghan communities and spark additional violence.

END SUMMARY

MOI: KEEP A SHORT LEASH ON UNCONVENTIONAL SECURITY FORCES

¶3. (C/NF) While many senior GIROA officials -- including Rural Reconstruction and Development Minister Ehsan Zia, Defense Minister Wardak and Afghan Army Operations Chief LTG Sher Karimi -- oppose unconventional security forces in principle, Interior Minister Hanif Atmar appears to have the best developed sense among Afghan leaders of how to restrain them in practice) not by suppressing them but by shaping and overseeing them. LTG Jamal Abdalnaseer Siddique, Deputy Interior Minister for Strategy and Policy, and Atmar's highest-ranking political appointee, told Pol-Mil Officer that Atmar wants to use the traditional militia concept but tame it and bring it under state control. Locals who are loyal to the government and register their existing arms could serve as police auxiliaries, receiving food and even some pay from MOI in return for helping the police. Atmar's longest-serving advisor, Habib Wayand, explained that the Minister prefers to encourage small groups linked to local shuras, rather than large militias that might bite back or prove loyal to commanders with their own agendas.

¶4. (C/NF) These local auxiliaries must be compensated individually by the Ministry, not through their commanders, who could siphon off compensation or use funds to build a force loyal to themselves. Minister Atmar's model for local security is the Afghan Public Protection Program (AP3), in which local shuras select young men who are vetted by GIROA institutions, trained by U.S. Special Forces and paid by MOI for static guard duties, and answer to local police commanders. Atmar wants AP3 to expand to other provinces and eventually merge its members into the
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regular police force.

AP3: EARLY SUCCESSES, BUT EXPANSION ON HOLD

¶5. (C/NF) AP3 is not expanding at this juncture, but taking stock. From March to August, the USFOR-A element known as Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) trained and deployed 548 locals as community guardians in four districts in Wardak province as part of the AP3 program (ref A). CFSOCC-A has a fifth class of at least 150 men on hold while it works with MOI to reform the command and control structure for AP3, establishing clear lines of authority from MOI to the district level. CFSOCC-A is also working with Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan (CSTC-A) to fix food allowance payments and distribution of cold weather gear. AP3 expansion also awaits ISAF/ANSF efforts to clear more of Wardak's Seyedabad district of insurgents, creating space for AP3 recruitment.

¶6. (C/NF) The guardians have had notable successes -- in October, they discovered and dismantled eight IEDs, more than any other ANSF unit in Wardak. Wardak Governor Mohammad Halim Fedai, in a letter to the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, states that the additional security AP3 guardians have provided has allowed the provincial government to step up mobile police patrols; open schools; convene public meetings; enjoy a significant reduction in rocket attacks and IED emplacements; ramp up work on the Maydan Shahr - Bamyan highway; and, reduce travel time on other highways by deterring insurgents and criminals from shaking down motorists.

¶7. (C/NF) However, the Governor also complained about problems with pay and equipment and expressed concern that AP3 no longer receives the same high-level attention from U.S. forces and MOI that it did at its inception. He pointed to confusion over command and control and a dearth of promised development projects for APPF districts. (COMMENT: To the extent that AP3 is succeeding, it is because communities accept the guardians and are willing to put their young men in uniform, on the government payroll, and under the authority of the police. In communities with stronger insurgent support -- such as Wardak's Sayeedabad district -- it may be more difficult for locals to accept police in any

form.
END COMMENT.)

MIR ALAM'S KUNDUZ MILITIA: OVERTONES OF ETHNIC WARFARE

¶8. (S/NF) In July, Kunduz Governor Mohammad Omar asked Minister Atmar to expand AP3 to his province, but the Minister was unable to do so as the program was still in its trial phase. Omar and his NDS chief then asked for the support of Tajik and Uzbek militia forces under former Northern Alliance commander Mir Alam Khan (ref D). While Khan claims that his 500-man militia is under the legal control of the NDS, he maintains operational control of the force and distributes its pay. (COMMENT: This is likely a meaningless distinction -- the Kunduz NDS Chief is Mir Alam Khan's brother-in-law. END COMMENT.)

¶9. (S/NF) Armed with weapons cached earlier this decade while Mir Alam Khan participated in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR), his militia has killed four Taliban commanders and 47 fighters, and captured 20 villages previously under Taliban control. The initiative is entirely local -- MOI contacts told Pol-Mil officer that the Ministry was not involved with the Kunduz militia, and demurred when he asked whether this initiative crossed Minister Atmar's red-lines on unconventional security forces. Mir Alam Khan likely does not need MOI support -- reporting indicates that Vice President Massoud and Marshal Fahim Khan both support Mir Alam's efforts, which are locally popular as well.

¶10. (S/NF) Kunduz's demographics -- the province's Pashtun population, at 36 percent, is the highest in RC-North -- may account for Tajik and Uzbek anxiety. Pashtuns' exclusion KABUL 00003661 003 OF 005 from local political power after 2001 may account for their discontent and support for insurgent groups. In an October meeting with a senior U.S. military leader, Mir Alam Khan made an illustrative claim -- that Kunduz's security problems derived from the DDR and Disarmament of Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG) programs, which disarmed local (Tajik and Uzbek) commanders and, in his view, enabled Taliban to enter the province and local anti-GIROA Pashtuns to assert themselves.

PRIVATE SECURITY AND PUBLIC GUARDS: ATMAR TAMES A BEAST

¶11. (SBU) Over the next five years, Minister Atmar envisions replacing Afghanistan's fifty-two registered private security companies (PSCs) with a public guard force paid by customers but administered by MOI. The force would guard private businesses, ISAF supply convoys and bases, infrastructure, and construction projects. Its size would vary according to demand but could reach 47,000 above and beyond the regular police ceiling (currently 96,800, likely to rise to 160,000 in 2010). While the public guard concept would leave room for international security providers with specialized services (e.g. Ghurkha guards for international organizations and Embassies) it would effectively nationalize the Afghan PSCs and put their estimated 30,000 employees under MOI control.

¶12. (C/NF) Atmar's advisors argue that there is precedent for a public guard in the Faryab 500 (a local police force in Ghowrmach district, administered from Faryab province, which is paid for by the Asian Development Bank to secure a bank-funded portion of Ring Road construction; ref E), and the Aynak copper mine and Salma (Herat) dam projects, where Chinese and Indian developers pay police salaries. Atmar's advisors described his motivations to us: a public guard would help MOI grow the police force beyond the level donors are presently willing to fund; it would be a revenue source for MOI; by controlling pay for private guards it would lessen competition for ANSF recruiting; and, it would bring privately-controlled armed groups under government authority. (COMMENT: There are

practical and political difficulties with the Public Guard concept. The Faryab 500 are experiencing high turnover due to irregular payment by MOI. This is in spite of the Asian Development Bank regularly paying MOI via the Finance Ministry. Current U.S. law does not allow the military to contract security from another government. Many Afghan PSCs are a lucrative source of income for former warlords and other influential power-brokers, who will likely oppose nationalization. END COMMENT)

¶13. (C/NF) Atmar's UN advisor told us in October that MOI had recently bowed to political pressure and licensed 15 new private security companies (adding to an original list of 39). Several were linked to political power-brokers, including Mallik Zarin of Konar and Siddique Mojaddedi, the Meshrano Jirga speaker's son. (Mojaddedi, who ran a PSC in Australia, also seeks to be Atmar's advisor on the subject -- a move resisted by the Minister thus far.) Several sources close to Atmar describe him as reluctantly bowing to political pressure from well-connected security entrepreneurs, but with a plan to ultimately supplant them. Atmar's anxiety over Afghan PSCs is part and parcel of his concern over non-state actors with arms -- such as the Kunduz militia -- who are privately controlled and owe their loyalty to paymasters outside of government control.

¶14. (C/NF) ISAF, USFOR-A, and Embassy Kabul are discussing and will soon raise with Atmar an alternative approach to a public guard: stricter MOI licensing and regulation of PSCs. We believe this could meet Atmar's professed sovereignty concerns regarding oversight of the PSC function while avoiding the bureaucratic complications of trying to add the management of thousands of PSC personnel to a Ministry already struggling with police growth.

ARBAKAI FOR ELECTIONS AND THE PALACE CONNECTION

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¶15. (C/NF) During the first round of this year's elections, deputized locals worked with ANSF to provide additional security at polling stations, but their role was limited and many were not paid as promised (ref F). MOI contacts assert that the Palace, rather than MOI, was responsible for paying these local auxiliaries. MOI sources allege that Presidential advisor and head of the Independent Directorate for Protection of Public Properties and Highways Mohammad Arif Khan Noorzai (who is also Ahmad Wali Karzai's brother-in-law) was in charge of these efforts. In September, when tribal leaders from Khost sought government support to pay 100 arbakai (traditional community security guards who answer to local shuras) per district, they approached Noorzai rather than MOI, MOD, or NDS. Noorzai reportedly told elders that the Palace had no budget to support them. Noorzai's role, and that of his directorate, are ambiguous, but at least some Afghans view him as a source of financial support for unconventional security forces outside of regular security ministries.

¶16. (SBU) Even without Palace support, some locals are establishing and funding militia of their own. In the Loya Paktia region of RC-East (the only region of the country with a real tradition of arbakai or tribal levies), the Zazi (Jaji) tribe has raised an arbakai to keep insurgents out of their communities (septel). Their initiative is a reaction against insurgent violence, but also reflects their dissatisfaction with the government, which they do not trust to protect them.

CDI IN INITIAL PHASE PENDING GIROA APPROVAL

¶17. (S/NF) CFSOCC-A is conducting survey work and tribal engagement for its Community Defense Initiative (CDI) a program whereby U.S. Special Forces (ODA) teams would provide embedded training, communications equipment and ammunition to local communities with a proven track record of opposing

insurgents. (CDI would not provide arms, however, as CFSOCC-A assesses that the communities in question have plenty of their own, nor does CFSOCC-A intend to provide stipends to village guards.) CFSOCC-A contends that ODA training and the ability reliably to call for assistance from ISAF/GIRoA forces would better enable these communities to exclude insurgents from their territory and report on their movements. CFSOCC-A tentatively plans to introduce the concept in nine districts of Regional Commands South, East, and West, where ANSF are absent. CFSOCC-A has begun outreach on CDI to local shuras.

¶18. (SBU) That said, while senior ISAF officers have sought GIRoA ministers' approval of CDI, and have underscored the need for transition of CDI to GIRoA oversight, GIRoA has not formally approved the program. In a meeting on October 27, the Ambassador briefed National Security Advisor Rassoul on the parameters of the CDI program. The Ambassador noted that the program had great merits but would need the firm approval of the President and the cabinet before implementation. Rassoul demurred, suggesting that the Embassy raise the issue with President Karzai, who he said has concerns over the program. The Ambassador reiterated that there must be clear, collective Afghan ownership of such a program. Toward this purpose, we are developing with USFOR-A a draft agreement on CDI among U.S. Forces Afghanistan, GIRoA ministries (including the Ministries of Defense and Interior), and the National Security Advisor, which includes a commitment for CDI's transition to GIRoA control. Ambassador Eikenberry has informed U.S. Forces Afghanistan that he will not authorize the use of 1208 funding, nor the deployment of USG civilian personnel in support of CDI operations, until GIRoA has signed an agreement clearly delineating its own responsibility for such a program (including selection of a lead ministry whose minister would become personally responsible for the program; SEPTTEL to follow).

COMMENT: SUPPORT AFGHANS' BEST IMPULSES, NOT THEIR WORST HABITS

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¶19. (C/NF) Insufficient security forces, coupled with poor police performance and corruption, contribute to locals' sense that GIRoA cannot protect them, and that the ANSF may, indeed, sometimes pose a threat. As we strengthen and grow the ANSF, particularly the police, they will be better able to earn the people's trust, binding communities to their government through the provision of security and justice. However, full ANSF development will take at least four years, and communities' security needs are immediate. Afghans will resort to traditional self-defense mechanisms in the meantime, but unsupervised, those mechanisms can tend in dangerous directions. Mir Alam's Kunduz militia -- ethnically divisive, controlled by one man, grounded in contempt for DIAG and the rule of law -- exemplifies a quick fix with dangerous implications: tactical gains at strategic cost.

¶20. (C/NF) In contrast, Minister Atmar's policy of shaping and controlling these local initiatives seems a pragmatic way of asserting GIRoA's sovereignty over armed persons, along with a degree of influence. There is a wide gulf between AP3 and the Kunduz militia. Local arbakai could move toward either pole depending on incentives and the signals we and GIRoA send. Clear redlines on unconventional security forces from GIRoA, and clear U.S. support for those redlines could avert the re-armament of the Afghan countryside that competing local militias would likely engender.

¶21. (C/NF) Correspondingly, ambiguous U.S. policies, or our tolerance of or support for un-regulated forces, would encourage some of the worst Afghan traditional tendencies and undermine popular and international support for further ANSF development. It would also raise suspicions of our intentions among Afghans who perceived themselves as victims of various militias. The best way to meet local communities' legitimate security needs while we grow the police and army

is to insist that local security initiatives remain tightly-controlled by GIRA and monitored by the international community. These can remain somewhat improvisational, as stop-gap measures eventually to be demobilized or merged into the police and army. The U.S. should only deploy its resources and prestige in support of programs that reflect GIRA's highest standards, not traditional bad habits.

END COMMENT

EIKENBERRY